

3 John: A Commentary

Hospitality – of the Christian Variety!

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Hospitality is, perhaps, one of the oldest patterns of interactions between human beings. The word indicates receiving or welcoming people who are in various sorts of needs (food, shelter, safety, etc.) and providing or making provisions for those needs. It is not the purpose of this writing to trace the origins and developments of hospitality throughout history and how different cultures view such practice. It is sufficient to here say, however, that hospitality in the Levant (countries around the eastern Mediterranean Sea from Greece to Egypt, especially Israel, Syria, and Lebanon) was regarded as “a sacred duty” (Stein 1915, 105). So, it existed before the advent of the Christian faith and even took - and continues to take - place outside the parameters of such faith.

So, is there anything unique or special when it comes to the practice of hospitality in the context of the Christian faith? Does one’s motive/s or method/s really matter, as long as it occurs?

Jesus Himself was the recipient of hospitality during His days in the flesh, as well as His disciples. The missionary work of Paul, Peter, and others was also assisted by this benevolent activity. In fact, Vernon H. Kooy states that “hospitality was the chief bond which brought the churches a sense of unity” (1962, 654).

Neither in the OT nor the NT, however, did hospitality occur without abuses, misunderstandings, manipulations, and dangers. A specific example of concerns, conflicts, and disagreements surrounding hospitality is addressed in 3 John. The forthcoming details of that situation are interesting, to say the least.

The 1966 Italian epic Spaghetti western film, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” was directed by Sergio Leone and starring Clint Eastwood as the Good, Lee Van Cleef as the Bad, and Eli Wallach as the Ugly. It was a mix of violence, tension, and gunfights. The plot revolved around three gunslingers who were in competition to find fortune in a buried cache of Confederate gold.

As somewhat of a spinoff of the title of this film, details about hospitality revolve around 5 major ideas: **The Glad – The Bad – The Good – The Could – The Would.**

Each of these major ideas is fleshed out in sub-sections and key accents (*in italics*):

THE GLAD

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THE BAD

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3 John

THE GLAD

I COMMUNICATION (v. 1)

Identifications

A. Writer (v. 1a)

ho presbuteros (“The elder”)

This is the same term of identification with which 2 John opens. The word occurs 63 times in the NT in the plural, and only 4 times in the singular (1 Ti. 5:2, 19; 2 Jo. 1; 3 Jo. 1). A footnote (a, 463) in the *New Evangelical Translation* suggests that the word “can be viewed as a proper title for John (equivalent to ‘the venerable John’) since he apparently outlived all of Jesus’ disciples by some 25 years.”

However, since the word typically suggests a position of respectful leadership, honor, and authority so as to approach a church in matters of appropriate conduct, confrontation, and counsel, this writing may be more than a mere personal letter to a friend.

Marshall, for example, thinks 2 John is more than a private letter, despite the warm tone which decorates it, and actually “has the force of an official communication” (1978, 82). This, indeed, makes sense, since the issue of *hospitality* constitutes the very core of this communication.

Perhaps, both ideas may be safely adopted on this matter. Whatever conclusion one may reach, it does not affect the purpose or aim of this writing.

B. Wronged-One (v. 1b)

Gaio to agapeto, hon ego agapo en aletheia (“to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth”)

The name Gaius is mentioned 4 times in the NT: Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Co. 1:14. It is not certain if the one mentioned here is

one of those noted in these passages. After all, Gaius was a very familiar name during this time of history (Findlay 1909, 36). But even if his exact identity may remain cloudy to present readers, he is regarded by John as *to agapeto* (“the beloved” – v. 2, 5, 11), the word indicating “one who is the object of love” by God and John.

So, in light of the opposition he had received from Diotrephes, John sensed he needed encouragement and provided it by means of this fourfold use of the word.

As the eyes may plainly see, the ordinary word for the Godly, sacrificial kind of love used in the NT (*agape*) is the very root of the word *agapeto* (“beloved”). It is used by John also in 1 Jo. 2:7; 3:2; 21; 4:1, 7, 11.

John then proceeds to emphasize just how his love for Gaius is framed. By the use of *ego* (“I”), John stresses that *his* love for Gaius circulates in the sphere of *aletheia* (“truth”). This word is common in 1 Jo (1:6, 8; 2:4, 21 (twice); 3:18, 19; 4:6; 5:6); 2 Jo. 1 (twice), 2, 3, 4; and 3 Jo. 1, 3 (twice), 4, 8, 12.

Here, the primary meaning is that of “‘sincerity’ or ‘honesty’” (Bultmann 1964, 243). Indeed, it is in the sphere of truth wherein genuineness, authenticity, wholeheartedness, and the absence of hypocrisy circulates. Henry Sawtelle comments:

Not truly, but in the truth-element, in truth as a living system or principle, reflecting and involving the divine nature. The words express the nature, ground, and sphere of John’s love to Gaius. It is not an earthly love, having a temporary inspiration or reason. The truth of God had become a living element of the soul, both in Gaius and in John. . . . There was between them a common experience of God. This was love in the heavenly sense, and without end. (1888, 77)

II CONCERN FOR GAIUS (v. 2)

Supplication

A. Wish for Physical Health to Continue (v. 2a)

Agapete, peri panton euchomai se euodousthai kai hugiainein
("Beloved, in all respects I am praying for you to continue being successful and to have good health physically ")

Here for the second time, Gaius is addressed as '*Agapeto*.

The present tense word *euchomai* ("I am praying") is the only time John ever uses this term in any of his writings. [It occurs elsewhere in the NT in Ac. 26:29; 27:29; Ro. 9:3; 2 Co. 13:7, 9; Ja. 5:16.] It indicates a "prayer" or an ongoing "wish" or "longing" that Gaius is the recipient of *success* and *physical well-being*. [In the 1st century, this was a rather customary prayer, wish or longing for something from one friend to another].

Here, this desire of John is specifically directed: *euodousthai* ("to be prosperous, to have a good or successful journey, have things go well" – cp. the other occurrences of this word in the NT: Ro. 1:10; 1 Co. 16:2). Plummer notes that this "means exactly to 'have a good career'" (1950, 1). This may also be "a wish for health which is very common in the letters of antiquity, though this is the only instance in the NT" (Michaelis 1967, 114). The present tense of the verb indicates that the desire is for it *to continue*.

So, the "success" of which John is writing is not only "health" but also identified in v. 3 as "walking in truth." More about this to follow.

The word *hugiainein* ("to have good health"), as used by Paul (1 Ti. 1:10; 6:3; 2 Ti. 1:13; 4:3; Ti. 1:9, 13; 2:1, 2) always refers to *sound teaching*. Here, however, as well as Lk. 5:31; 7:10; 15:27, it refers to physical or "bodily health" (Robertson 1933, 260; Brooke 1912, 182). Although not as important as spiritual health, it is still an important variable, as indicated in the life of Jesus. For example, in Mt. 12:13 and Mk. 5:34, at the very word of Jesus, health was visibly restored. Mt. 15:31 states those who had been unable to talk were made to speak by Jesus; the crippled were cured; the lame were made to walk; and the blind had their sight restored. In Acts 4:10, the power to heal a crippled man had been given to

Peter and John. As Bietenhard points out, “this kind of healing does not take place through the use of magic formulae nor does it stand in the power or at the whim of the healer. It is Jesus Himself who heals” (1967, 277).

This word cannot refer to *existing bad health or sickness* on the part of Gaius because the word *kathos* (“just as”) to follow draws a parallel to the *successful* “soul.” Also, again, he uses the present tense verb to express that good health will *continue*. Plus, to wish good health for people was then, and is now, simply part of good or best wishes for people. It is a common or typical wish among friends. So, the same is true here.

Also, from a very practical perspective, as Lenski points out, “John would not want to send his missionaries to a sick man’s home and to burden a sick man with lodging them and outfitting them for the next stage of their journey” (1966, 578).

B. Well-being of Spiritual Condition (v. 2b)

kathos euodoutai sou he psuche (“just as your soul is being successful spiritually”)

The word *kathos* (“just as”) indicates a comparative perspective but with a spiritual twist. Paul Hoon points out a significant blending by the author:

The elder’s spiritualization of conventional greetings, making religious well-being the measure of good in other matters, rebukes our concern – if not obsession – with physical health and material prosperity as the maximum good in life, and causes us to rethink what we mean when we express the hope that **all may go well** and that one **may keep well**. Many people are healthy animals but desperately sick souls. (1957, 308)

The word *psuche* (“soul”) “indicates a moral being designed for everlasting life” (Vincent 1887, 400).

So, the elder’s desire for external, *physical* blessings from God for Gaius is here set forth. But it is done so with the understanding that *spiritual* well-being exceeds anything physical. That is, “the assured spiritual well-being is taken as the measure of good wishes in other matters” (Wilder 1957, 309) - including physical ones. But physical well-being, as desirable as it is, at best, is always and only temporary. All will eventually die.

III COMMENDATION OF GAIUS (v. 3-8)

Exultation

A. Walking in Truth (v. 3-4)

V. 3:

echaren gar lian erchomenon adelphon kai marturounton su te aletheia, kathos su en aletheia peripateis (“For I have been gladdened exceedingly with the coming of brethren also bearing witness to your truth, how you are walking in truth”)

The word *gar* (“For”) provides the reason why John is so confident in the spiritual success of Gaius.

The verb *echaren* is a 2nd Aorist tense, indicative mode, and passive voice which points to a moment of emotional high upon receiving some positive news about Gaius from unidentified fellow Christians. The present tense participles (*erchomenon* – “coming” and *marturounton* – “bearing witness”) indicate repetitive visits “from time to time” (Robertson 1933, 260). To designate the news they brought often to John as *sou te aletheia* (“your truth”) means that truth had become the very core of his conduct. His inner character was manifested in his outward behavior or “corresponded with his daily walk” (McDowell 1972, 229). Indeed, it included “every sphere of life, moral, intellectual, spiritual . . . that Gaius’ whole life corresponded to the highest standard of life and conduct” (Brooke 1912, 183).

Another present tense participle, *peripateis* (“you are walking”) denotes the regular, consistent pattern of his life. The pronoun *su* “is emphatic, suggesting a contrast with less faithful ones, as Diotrophes, ver. 9” (Vincent 1887, 400).

It further underscores the fact that the sphere of his very existence was *en aletheia* (“in truth”), as if nothing else was ever under consideration.

One specific example of *walking in truth* is that of practicing hospitality for other Christians (vs. 5-8), the details of which will be expanded when the verses are shortly evaluated.

V. 4:

meizoteran touton ouk echo charan, hina akouo ta ema tekna en te aletheia peripatounta (“I do not have greater joy than these things, that I hear my children are walking in the truth”)

The word *meizoteros* (“greater”) occurs only here in the NT. It is “made doubly emphatic, first by position at the beginning of the sentence, and secondly by the double comparative” (Plummer 1950, 1).

It indicates a comparative perspective in the superlative or highest degree of comparison. Plus, the word *touton* is plural and should not be translated “this,” but “these things.” In other words, John is “thinking of more than one occasion on which he had experienced the joy of which he speaks” (Brooke 1912, 183). Imagine that “joy” could not be better, higher, or greater than what he here declares: “my children are walking in the truth.”

This excessive and without any degree of comparison kind of “joy” was **not** that he is:

the pastor of a large church; drives a fancy and expensive vehicle; lives in an elaborate house; spoke at the largest gathered convention of conservative Christians in the country; could read and speak both Hebrew and Greek; was scheduled to retire in 6 months with a luxurious layout of unlimited pleasurable options; had plenty of financially profitable interim pastor opportunities lined up; or any

other such culturally attractive potentials.

Rather, this exceedingly, unsurpassable “joy” was something which many would never have identified: “my children are walking in the truth.”

The expression *ta ema tekna* (“my children”) is a shift from attention being strictly related to Gaius alone. In other words, it indicates “the peculiarly intimate relationship between the elder and followers like Gaius whom he had perhaps himself converted” (Wilder 1957, 309). Or, at the very least, it refers to any and all “people under his pastoral care” (Marshall 1978, 84).

This very term, *tekna*, was used by Paul in 1 Co. 4:14 and Ga. 4:19 to refer to those converted under his ministry. So, the conclusion one may draw about the precise people here referenced seems legitimately open to either choice.

The word *peripateis* (“are walking”) is a present tense participle indicating an ongoing, consistent or habitual lifestyle in which *aletheia* (“truth”) is the axis/stem/root around which attitudes, actions, and aspirations circulate. In addition to what has already been said earlier about “truth,” it certainly includes “fidelity to the gospel” (Wilder 1957, 309). It is, indeed, sad to say that “many do not have their joy rooted thus completely in the truth” (Lenski 1966, 581).

So, as indicated above, one particular aspect of that truth within the gospel will now be demonstrated in v. 5-8.

Celebration

B. Watershed of Hospitality (v. 5-8)

A watershed is a turning point; a point at which a notable change takes place. The Christian faith is a demonstrative faith, that is, a faith which reveals itself in action/s. The particular action addressed in 3 John is, of course, that of hospitality. Also, it is interesting that one of the requirements for church leaders/bishops is *hospitality* (1 Ti. 3:2; Ti. 1:8).

Furthermore, as noted by Barclay,

In the early church the Christian home was the place of

the open door and the loving welcome. There can be few nobler works than to give a stranger the right of entry to a Christian home. The Christian family circle should always be wide enough to have a place for the stranger, no matter where he comes from or what his colour. (1976, 150)

1. Work for Others (v. 5)

Agapete, piston poieis ho ean ergase eis tous adelphous kai touto xenous (“Beloved, you are acting in a faithful manner for whatever you may have accomplished for the brethren and those strangers”)

The term of endearment, *agamete* (“beloved”), is used by John once again, as if to put additional flavor on his favored assessment of Gaius.

The verb *poieis* is a present tense verb denoting that the on-going work of Gaius in behalf of the brethren and those he does not even know is worthy of recognition. The word *piston* means it was “‘worthy to be believed, trustworthy’ . . . and was not mere hospitality but a religious service: a work of faith” (Smith 1897, 206). “Only a believer will do a faithful thing” (Lenski 1966, 582).

All his conduct towards the brethren, even when they were not previously known to him, was such as became a faithful Christian. This was his special merit: he treated brethren who were entire strangers to him, not as strangers, but as brethren. He did not pick and choose, showing hospitality to those he liked and neglecting the rest. Every missionary was sure of a welcome from Gaius. (Plummer 1950, 2)

The use of *ean* with the 1st Aorist subjunctive mode of *ergase* “is indefinite and implies an unspecified number of ways or occasions of helping the brothers” (Marshall 1978, 85) in the

past. In other words, there was “habitual and constant hospitality” (Smith 1897, 206).

The witness or testimony of those mentioned in v. 3 lends additional weight to the significance of his faithfulness with regard to the ministry of hospitality. It is possible that John has another reason for highlighting his ministry of hospitality: setting the stage for a stark contrast with Diotrephes (v. 9-10) who stood in opposition to such ministry.

tous xenous (“those strangers”) refers to other believers whom John did not know personally.

2. Witness Worthy of God (v. 6)

hoi emarturesan sou te agape enopion ekklesias, hous kalos poieseis propempsas axios tou theou (“they bore witness to your love before the church, you shall do well by having sent them forward in a manner worthy of God”)

The word *amarturesan* (“they bore witness”) is a 1st Aorist tense verb indicating a time in which the brothers [and perhaps the strangers also] went publicly before the church to speak favorably in behalf of Gaius. They did so for “encouragement” (Bengel 1864, 821). It was his love which they saw as the motivation behind his kind actions for them.

This is the first occurrence of the word *ekklesia* in this brief writing and will be used again in verses 9 and 10.

It is interesting that John did not use this word in the gospel narrative or 1 and 2 John.

John now, therefore, communicates to Gaius that such love will continue to operate by having sent them on their way.

The verb *prosempsas* (“having sent them forward”) calls upon making provisions for them and not just a pleasant *good-bye*, *good luck*, and *may God be with you*. It involves “providing for their journey – supplying them with food and money to pay for their expenses, washing their clothes, and generally helping

them to travel as comfortably as possible” (Marshall 1978, 86). John further stipulates that such provisions should not stem from a reluctant sense of mere dutifulness but with genuine, Godly generosity: *axios tou theou* (“in a manner worthy of God”). In other words, treat them as if they were God Himself or the way in which God Himself would treat them. Indeed, “the love of Gaius would not be miserly” (Lenski 1966, 583). This, of course, reflects what Jesus said in Jo. 13:20, and Paul in Ro. 16:2; Ep. 4:1; Ph. 1:27; Col. 1:10; cp. Mt. 25:31-46.

3. Working Together (v. 7-8)

V. 7

huper gar tou onomatos exelthon meden lambanontes apo ton ethnikon (“For they went out for the sake of the name receiving nothing from the Gentiles”)

This statement provides additional motivation for making provisions for these brothers. Completely divorced from selfish or undesirable frameworks, they launched out in ministry *huper tou anomatos* (“for the sake of the name”). The name of Jesus indicates His nature, His authority, His purpose. This idea is captured in Jo. 14:13, 14, 26; 15:16, 21; 16:23, 24, 26; repeatedly in Acts and many of Paul’s letters.

meden lambanontes apo ton ethnikon (“receiving nothing from the Gentiles”)

These aforementioned “brothers and strangers” conducted their missionary work like the Apostle Paul by “refusing support from those amongst whom they were working as Missionaries. They had therefore a special claim on the hospitality and help of the Churches in places through which they had to pass” (Brooke 1912, 186). “They waived their right; and labored gratuitously, or suffered the spoiling of their goods” (Bengel 1864, 821). As Plummer notes, “nothing wins me over as much as clear proofs of disinterestedness. The missionary

who is suspected of self-seeking will preach in vain” (1950, 2).

The word for “gentiles” is *ethnikon* and occurs in the NT only here and Mt. 5:47; 6:7; 18:17; Ga. 2:14. It means “national,’ ‘foreign,’ ‘Gentile’” (Preisker 1964, 372).

V. 8

hemeis oun opheilomen hupolambanein tous toioutous, hina sunergoi ginometha te aletheia (“Therefore, we are obligated to habitually receiving/welcoming such ones in order that we may become fellow-workers in the truth”)

It is the nature of the Christian faith that many privileges are part of the package. Not to be neglected, however, is the equal reality of responsibilities or obligations. And one of those obligations or responsibilities is here identified: *always receiving or welcoming fellow-believers who are on a mission for God and making provisions for their numerous needs.*

The word *hemeis* is “emphatic in contrast to the Gentiles” and constitutes a “moral obligation” (Smith 1897, 207).

So, the word “receiving” indicates “receiving with hospitality and especially of *supporting*” (Brooke 1912, 187). The word originally meant ‘to take underneath in order to raise, hence, to support’ (Vincent 1887, 402) or “to assist” (Lenski 1966, 584).

The purpose in making such provisions *for* others is that we thereby become fellow-workers *with* others in the mission of declaring and sharing the truth of the Christian faith *to* others. The expression *sunergoi te aletheia* (“fellow-workers in the truth”) indicates that all those who participate in the ministry of hospitality are what Moffatt calls “allies of the Truth” (*The New Testament: A New Translation*; Hoon 1957, 310). Lenski states “we are joint workers with the missionaries when we support them; they and we jointly work ‘for the truth (gospel), *te aletheia*” (1966, 584).

Although these verses were originally sent to Gaius, a layman in the church, all laymen should “imitate Gaius’ spirit in furthering the work and growth of the gospel. . . Service offered in abandoned, joyful love to God and kept pure from worldly compromise, commercialism, flattery, and patronage, alone is worthy of Christ” (Ibid.).

There is a great Christian thought here. A man’s circumstances may be such that he cannot become a missionary or a preacher. Life may have put him in a position where he must get on with a secular job, staying in the one place and carrying out the routine duties of life and living. But where he cannot go, his money and his prayers and his practical support can go. Not everyone can be, so to speak, in the front line; but by supporting those who are there, he can make himself an ally of the truth. When we remember that, all giving to the wider work of Christ and his church must become not an obligation but a privilege, not a duty but a delight. The church needs those who will go out with the truth, but it also needs those who will be allies of the truth at home. (Barclay 1976, 151)

It has also been the documented testimony throughout both Christian and secular history that positive, constructive efforts for almost everything always face opposition and resistance. John writes about his experience of such in the following two verses.

THE BAD

IV CRITICISM OF DIOTREPHES (v. 9-10)

Denunciation

A. Writing of John Rejected (v. 9)

Egrapha ti te ekklesia, all' ho philoproteuon auton Diotrephes ouk epidechetai hemas ("I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes who loves to be first among them does not recognize us")

This "something" which John had written to the church is not clear. Presumably, it was regarding the matter of hospitality. After all, the one who opposed such ministry is now singled out. Such outreach to the needs of others which would be reflected in John's writing, was not recognized by Diotrephes. For some reason, he did not accept John's authority to write and recommend to the church this issue of hospitality. Perhaps, he was fearful of cases of abuse on the basis of past experiences; perhaps, he did not regard it as a high priority and preferred other ways for the church to minister. Guesses abound. Lenski thinks "he wants to be a boss, a dictator, a lord of all the rest, instead of letting the congregation be the *kuria* or mistress who manages all her affairs as *eklekte*, chosen to do so by the Lord (see II John 1, *kuria*)" (1966, 586).

But since John states that he loves to have the pre-eminence, his resistance may be located in either jealousy of John or outright selfishness (it was not his idea). The word occurs only here in the NT and indicates "fond of being first" (Vincent 1887, 403).

So, whatever conclusion one may form about the motive of Diotrephes in this regard, "the elder's letter will have been suppressed by Diotrephes" (Wilder 1957, 311).

It was the character and activity of this man, no doubt, that led the Elder to address his letter to Gaius and trust him to present its content in the right way to the church. Had the letter been addressed directly to the church, Diotrephes might have succeeded in having it suppressed. He must have been an obnoxious, unlovely person. (McDowell 1972, 230)

B. Works to be Recalled (v. 10a)

dai touto, ean eltho, hupomneso autou ta erga ha poiei (“For this reason, if I may come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does”)

His resistance, apparently, was not one of polite consideration and deliberative options conducted according to Robert’s Rules of Order. In fact, John declares that whenever he himself arrives at the church, he will make his case against him. John is “confident that the conduct of Diotrephes will not stand the light of truth, and that the Church will recognize the fact” (Brooke 1912, 189).

It is not John’s intentions to merely “remember his deeds” (KJV), but to ‘bring his works to remembrance,’ by reciting them at a meeting of the church . . . he will state the facts and let them speak for themselves” (Smith 1879, 207). So, John “is not afraid to match his authority against the pretended authority of the self-inflated Diotrephes” (McDowell 1972, 230). This “reciting them at a meeting of the church” reflects John’s adherence to the notation of Jesus in Mt. 18:17. “Nothing is too wickedly vicious for Diotrephes to hurl at us. When John quotes all his language, and many witnesses testify as to its truth, these words will terrify this lordly boss” (Lenski 1966, 587). The missionary brethren bore witness to the church of the love and faithfulness of Gaius to the truth, so the elder will bear witness to the church of the hostility of Diotrephes.

C. Wicked Words Retained (v. 10b)

logois ponerois phluaron hemas (“slandering us with wicked words”)

It is now revealed that any ideas about justifiable, excusable reasons behind the resistance of Diotrephes should be laid to rest. John nails down the two reasons behind the resistance: (1) the word *phluaron* is “used of babbling and talking nonsense and hence of making empty, groundless accusations; gossiping maliciously” (Marshall 1978, 91). David Smith put it this way: “The chatter of Diotrephes was not

only foolish but malevolent” (1897, 207). The word itself is from the word *phluo* which means “to bubble up or boil over. Hence of talk which is both *fluent* and *empty*” (Vincent 1887, 403). So, it is true:

A man is judged by those whom he attacks and by what he says of them, as well as by what he does. Is not Diotrophes’ condemnation that he is known in Christian history only as the man who spoke evilly against the most revered and beloved figure of Christendom in his day? Diotrophes’ selfish pride issued in outright insubordination (vs. 9) and provoked schism in the church (vs. 10). (Hoon 1957, 311)

D. Welcoming of Others Resisted (v. 10c)

kai ne arkoumenos epi toutois oute autos epidechetai tous adelphous kai tous boulomenous koluei kai ek tes ekklesias ekballei (“and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those desiring [to receive the brethren] and forces out of the church”)

(2) Here John notes that Diotrophes moved from words to deeds. Diotrophes himself did not practice hospitality and he forbade the church from doing so, as well. In fact, Diotrophes was so strongly opposed to such ministry that he somehow assumed the authority to expel from the church any who did practice hospitality. How he gained such power over the church is a matter of speculation rather than revelation, so, it seems unprofitable to engage in, perhaps, endless guesses. But he clearly reflects the attitude of the lawyers in Luke 11:52: “you did not enter yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.” Barclay suggests

Diotrophes was not a real Christian, as John saw it. The true Christian leader must always remember that strength and gentleness must go together and that leading and loving must go hand in hand. Diotrophes was like so many leaders

in the church. He may well have been right, but he took the wrong way to achieve his end, for no amount of strength of mind can take the place of love of heart. (1976, 153)

It seems like the 2 posted reasons represent an unreasonable resistance on the part of Diotrophes. If we had a package of more complete information on him and the particulars of the situation at hand, we might be able to form a more informed conclusion about him and them. Such is simply not the case, however, and our own conclusions must be somewhat tentative.

John, nevertheless, said that he would take care of the matter in person (v. 10) and exercise appropriate authority at that time. The attitude and actions of Diotrophes were obviously serious enough to justify John's subsequent actions. As Marshall so wisely points out: 'It is not Christian to refrain from exercising legitimate authority when there is a need to do so; the modern church is perhaps too chary [showing caution; careful; wary] in exercising brotherly admonition and even discipline when it is required" (1978, 91).

Hoon's perspective is disturbing enough: "Selfishness is the root sin, and with Diotrephes it takes the unlovely form of ecclesiastical ambition and domination. The story of the church through the centuries is saddened by the spectacle of those who like to put themselves first" (1957, 311).

THE GOOD

V CONTRAST OF PICTURES (v. 11)

Imitation

A. Warning to Avoid (v. 11a)

Agapete, me mimou to kaon ("Beloved, do not regularly imitate the evil")

Agapete occurs for the fourth time (v. 1, 2, 5). It is as if John wants to

keep everything said to Gaius anchored in love.

me mimou is a present tense, imperative verb of prohibition with regard to evil: “do not regularly or habitually or continuously imitate” it. That is, do not follow the example of evil practices or behaviors. Here, the evil may be restricted to the case at hand: wicked words and resistance to hospitality.

B. Worthy of Admonition (v. 11b)

alla to agathon. ho agathopoion ek tou theou estin; ho kakopoion ouch heoraken ton thon (“but [regularly imitate] the good. For the one who regularly practices good is from God; the one who regularly practices evil has not seen God”)

The alternative (*alla*) to pursuing “evil” is *to agathon* (“the good”) which, in this case, is showing hospitality, exactly what Gaius had been doing. So, John is commanding Gaius to continue practicing hospitality. Do not be discouraged, dissuaded, detoured, or deflected from such pathway of ministry; always resist the spirit of strife, selfishness, and injustice as demonstrated in Diotrephes. After all, Diotrephes is but one example of the general principle embedded in the maxim of the Christian faith: “the one who regularly practices good is from God; the one who regularly practices evil has not seen God.”

The ramifications of this maxim are clear: hospitality, well-doing, truth, and love collectively prove one’s “alliance with God in spiritual nature” (Sawtelle 1888, 84).

To say that “the one who regularly practices evil has not seen God” indicates a blindness to spiritual realities and no relationship or acquaintance with God. The implication, if not downright declaration, is that Diotrephes is in this state, regardless of whatever degree of Christian profession he may make. Indeed, “whatever differences there may be between believers as to ecclesiastical ordering or theology, Christian charity is a test to which all must submit” (Wilder

1957, 312).

So, while the bad example of Diotrephes cannot be denied, and must be dealt with accordingly, **THE GOOD** continues with the introduction of Demetrius.

VI COMMENDATION OF DEMETRIUS (v. 12)

“Demetrius is one of a different stamp altogether, and the contrast between him and Diotrephes would not be lost on the congregation” (McDowell 1972, 230-231).

Affirmation

A. Weighty Endorsement: “all, truth, we” (v. 12a)

Demetrio memarturetai hupo panton kai hupo autes tes aletheias; kai hemeis de martouroumen (“Demetrius has received testimony from everyone and from the truth itself; and we also give testimony”)

Demetrius, like Gaius, was a rather common name in the first century (Acts 19:19:24, 29; Demas may be a shortened form of this name: Co. 4:14; 2 Ti. 4:10; Phi. 24 (Findlay 1909, 39).

Demetrius is apparently the one who brought the letter from John to Gaius (Wilder 1957, 312; Sawtelle 1888, 84; Brooke 1912, 192; Robertson 1933, 265; Marshall 1978, 93). He may have been unknown to Gaius, however. So, John provides three testimonies as to his character: (1) “everyone” – that is, who knew him; (2) “the truth itself” – that is, his life was in accordance with the truth of the Christian faith, and manifested “unrightness of character” (Marshall 1978, 93); (3) John’s personal testimony - that is, John obviously knew him well, so the warmth and trust of John himself puts the icing on the cake. “The calm confidence with which this writer asserts his authority, both over Diotrephes and also as a witness, confirms us in the belief that ‘the elder’ is no less than the apostle” (Plummer 1950, 3).

B. Worry is Unnecessary (v. 12b)

kai oidas hoti he marturia hemon alethes estin (“and you know that our testimony is true”)

As if to seal the deal, John states that there is no need to worry about Demetrius. After all, the 3-fold collective testimony (“our”) put the matter at rest. The word *oidas* (“you know”) means to know by experience that something is “true” (echo of Jo. 19:35; 21:24). This is “truth and consequences.”

VII CONCLUSION (v. 13-15)

THE COULD

Obligation

A. Writing Deferred (v. 13)

Polla eichon grapsai soi all' ou thelo dia melanos kai kalamou soi graphein (“I had many things to write to you but I am not willing to write by means of ink and pen”)

Although John could have written more, he decided to defer it. As to why, we can only imagine. The words of Brooke are to be respected: “Where our knowledge is inadequate the building up of hypothesis is of the nature of pastime rather than of serious work” (1912, 182). Diligence in determining the meaning of what “is” said must take precedence over guessing at what “is not” said.

THE WOULD

Aspiration

B. Warmhearted Dialogue (v. 14)

elipizo de eutheos se idein, kai stoma pros stoma lalesomen (“but I am hoping to see you soon, and we shall speak face to face”)

His strongest *aspiration* was that he would see them in person. The joyful longings embedded in the word “hope” are obvious enough. The word “hope” is not an indication of uncertainty. It simply indicates that he is letting the Lord bring it about in His own time and way.

“The expression **face to face**, literally ‘mouth to mouth’ (*stoma pros stoma*) is a graphic description of intimate dialogue, for which in modern slang we might say ‘eyeball to eye ball’” (McDowell 1972, 231).

C. Well-Wishes Distributed (v. 15)

eirene soi. aspazontai se hoi philoi. aspazou tous philous kat' onoma (“Peace to you. The friends [here] greet you. Greet the friends [there] by name”)

The wish of “peace” to readers is common in the NT in both the opening, as well as closing, of a written communication. It is “peace” instead of warfare, opposition, hostility, and division; it is something which not even Diotrefes could or would disturb.

In the deepest sense peace is the gift of God to those who through faith and love (the two fundamental themes in the Johannine epistles) live in the eternal life of God now. Such peace partakes of the ultimate reality and harmony of the universe, and derives from the eternal life which is ‘from the beginning’ (1 John 1:1). This is the peace which Jesus at the Last Supper, facing the agony of Gethsemane and the Cross, could yet bequeath to his friends as John invokes it here, ‘My peace I give to you’ (John 14:27). (Hoon 1957, 313)

The familiar “friends” within John’s circle of associates added their greetings, another relatively common practice in written communications. It is “friends” rather than “the wicked prating

of enemies” (Plummer 1950, 3) – like Diotrephes!
John’s closing comments are couched in the form of an imperative:
aspazou tous kat’ onoma (“greet them by name, one-by-one”) -
another portrait of the love, truth, justice, harmony, compassion, and
spirit of sincerity with which he writes. The only other example of
kat’ onoma in the NT is Jo. 10:3 where the good shepherd calls his
sheep “by name.” No wonder John leaned on Jesus’ breast (Jo.13:25)
and was identified as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jo. 21:20).

Sermon Outlines and Principles for Christian Living

These outlines and principles are taken verbatim from HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS in *The Pulpit Commentary* (pp. 5-16).

Ideal Prosperity

vs. 2

- I THE APOSTLE PRAYS THAT HIS FRIEND GAIUS MAY HAVE TEMPORAL PROSPERITY AND PHYSICAL HEALTH
 - 1. Secular prosperity is desirable.
Principle:
(1) *Wealth is a wonderful power; and in the hands of a wise man it is a great boon both to himself and to others.*
 - 2. Physical health is desirable.
Principles:
(1) The state of the body exercises a great influence upon the mind and soul. It is the organ and agent of both; and, if it be unhealthy, our impressions of the outward will be untrue, and our influence upon the outward will be limited and feeble.
(2) Our spiritual feelings and expressions are considerably toned and coloured by our physical condition.
- II THE APOSTLE INDICATES THE REMARKABLE SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY OF HIS FRIEND GAIUS
Principle:
(1) This spiritual prosperity is more important than material progress and success.
- III THE APOSTLE MAKES THE PROSPERITY OF HIS SOUL THE MEASURE OF THE PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SECULAR PROSPERITY DESIRED FOR GAIUS
Principles:
(1) Unless our spiritual prosperity be at least commensurate with our temporal prosperity, the latter ceases to be a blessing.
(2) All the worldly wealth which a man possesses which is more than proportionate to the wealth of his soul, he will do well to get rid of at once, or by Divine grace bring the wealth of his soul into proportion with it.

(3) Without this correspondence we cannot use wealth aright, riches will injury us, the material will crush the spiritual in us.

(4) When outward riches are more than proportionate to his godliness and grace, they are a curse to their possessor.

Spiritual Prosperity

vs. 3-4

I ASPECTS OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

1. Truth appropriated in mind and heart.

Principles:

(1) There is utmost importance to correct religious belief.

2. Truth manifested in life and conduct.

(2) Practical life must be in harmony with one's professed creed.

(3) Gaius' faith was not a mere speculation or opinion, but a thing of deep feeling and firm conviction.

(4) The faith that does not influence the life towards harmony with itself is not faith in the scriptural sense; it is assent, or opinion, but it is not Christian faith, or saving faith.

(5) Real faith moulds the life into conformity with the truth believed.

II TESTIMONY TO SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY

Principles:

(1) It is a pleasure for good men to testify to the excellence of others.

(2) It is gratifying to a good man to receive the commendation of good men.

III THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY UPON THE GOOD.

1. The tender relation here mentioned.

2. The great joy here spoken of.

Principles:

(1) Every genuine Christian rejoices to find men walking in the truth.

(2) To Christian parents it is a far greater joy when their children give their hearts to God, and walk in truth.

(3) To hear of or to behold such fruits of our Christian work both humbles and rejoices us.

Hospitality

vs. 5-6

I HOSPITALITY EXERCISED.

1. The persons towards whom it had been exercised.
 - (1) Strangers
Principles:
 - (a) Entertaining our friends is not properly hospitality.
 - (b) It becomes a virtue of high order to entertain, at their own tables and in their families, such strangers as may be travelling.
 - (2) Brethren
 - (c) Hospitality should not be limited to them.
 - (d) The New Testament teaches that kindness should begin at home.
 - (e) Christian people have sometimes supplied the wants of the drunken, the indolent, and the wasteful, and neglected their own sober, industrious, and thrifty poor in their need.
2. The person by whom it had been exercised – Gaius.
Principles:
 - (1) Hospitality is frequently in the sacred Scriptures enjoined upon Christians as a duty.
 - (2) At the last judgment, one reason for the reward of the good is that they exercised hospitality, and one of the charges upon which the wicked will be condemned is the neglect of hospitality.
 - (3) The hospitality of Gaius was heart; for the whom he had entertained testified to his *love* (v. 6).
 - (4) “There is,” says Washington Irving, “an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality which cannot be described, but is immediately felt, and puts the stranger at once at his ease.”

II HOSPITALITY ACKNOWLEDGED.

Principles:

- (1) Gratefully to testify to kindness like that of Gaius must be a delight to those who are worthy recipients of it.

III HOSPITALITY ENCOURAGED.

- (2) Here is an admirable rule for regulating the exercise of hospitality:
“worthily of God.”
- (3) The exercise of this duty is often richly rewarded in the present.
- (4) Certain and splendid is its reward in the future.

Missionary Workers and Helpers vs. 7-8

I MISSIONARY WORKERS.

Principles:

- (1) The Bible is remarkable for its universality.
- (2) Either directly or inferentially, it has something of importance and value to say on almost everything which affects human life and interests.

1. The motive of these Christian missionaries.

Principles:

- (1) In all that we do we are actuated by some motive or motives.
- (2) Christian work is no exception to this rule.
- (3) The most devoted workers in Christianity have a nobler motive than any one or all of these: zeal for a cause or society; or for the spread of certain doctrines or forms of Church government, etc.
- (4) The grand motive power for working the machinery of Christianity is love to the Lord Jesus Christ; not zeal for doctrines, however sound, but love to a Person; not the desire to build up the Church, still less to extend a denomination or sect; but a passionate attachment to the living Lord of the Church.
- (5) Christ himself is the life of Christianity. The great motive of the noblest Christian work is supreme love to him.
- (6) There is no motive like love; and love to a person will always prove a stronger motive than to a cause or creed.
- (7) When Christ is received into the heart he awakens its highest, holiest, intensest love. This love is the mightiest inspiration in Christian service. It can *dare* most, *do* most, *endure* most.

2. The policy of these Christian missionaries.

Principles:

- (1) The gospel should be proclaimed without charge to those who know it not; for they cannot be expected to prize it before they are acquainted with it.
- (2) We should always be able to say to the heathen, both at home and abroad, "I seek not yours, but you."

II MISSIONARY HELPERS.

1. To support the missionaries.

Principles:

- (1) Workers for Jesus Christ should be treated with kindness, generously entertained, and encouraged in their work.
 - (2) They need this from the Church. Without it they may "wax weary, fainting in their souls; and in that case the work will suffer."
2. To co-operate with the missionaries.
 - (3) By supporting the missionaries, Gaius would become a fellow-worker with them in promoting the cause of the truth.
 - (4) It is clearly implied that it is the duty of the Christian to be a fellow-worker in the cause of the truth. Knowing the truth ourselves, we are morally bound to make it known to others.
 - (5) Christians, behold your duty and privilege, to be either missionary workers or missionary helpers.

Diotrephes: a beacon

vs. 9-10

I THE CHARACTER OF DIOTREPHEs BRIEFLY STATED.

Principles:

- (1) Before honor is humility.
- (2) A man's pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.
- (3) The highest honour is won by the deepest humility.

II THE CHARACTER OF DIOTREPHEs ILLUSTRATED IN HIS CONDUCT.

1. He rejected the highest commendation.

Principles:

- (1) Diotrephes would not recognize the authority of John,

- (2) He would acknowledge no one to be greater than himself in the Church to which he belonged.
- 2. He defamed the fairest reputation.
 - (1) Loquacity
 - Principles:
 - (1) Prating is running on with speech.
 - (2) In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.
 - (3) Be slow to speak.
 - (4) Beware of the slavery of the tongue, and the sin of gab.
 - (2) Slander
 - (5) The holiest man is exposed to the venom of the tongue of the slanderer.
 - (6) Arrogance leads to terrible extremes; it dares to calumniate the 'most beautiful-spirited apostle.
 - (7) When a man has done wrong to another, he finds it necessary either to confess the wrong or to say false and wicked things against him he has wronged, hoping thereby to justify himself.
 - (8) The slanderer frequently assails the best of men. Be not dismayed if you are thus assailed.
- 3. He prohibited the exercise of a sacred privilege and duty.
 - Principles:
 - (1) "The dog in the manger" is the best exponent of his spirit and conduct.
 - (2) How terribly evil was the course he pursued!

III THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF DIOTREPHES CONDEMNED.

Principles:

- (1) There are awkward men in the Church; men who, if they have any grace at all, have so much of the devil in them still that their grace has but little control over them.
- (2) There is a work which compassion has to do; there is a sphere in which piety may be called into active exercise; at the same time, we are to mark those who cause divisions and offences, and to avoid them; and there is a certain class of men on whom pity has no effect, and compassion is lost; and the only thing which can be done is to 'deliver them over unto Satan, that they may learn not

to blaspheme.

- (3) Let us guard against the presence of growth of such a spirit in ourselves.
- (4) Let us take heed that we afford no encouragement or countenance to such a spirit in others.

Imitating the Good

vs. 11-12

I MAN IMITATES.

Principles:

- (1) The propensity to imitation is one of the strongest in human nature.
- (2) It is this which makes example so much mightier than precept.
- (3) The tender infant is stirred by it almost before it knows anything.
- (4) Very frequently we imitate others unconsciously.
- (5) The extent of our conscious and intentional imitation is very small as compared with our unconscious and unintentional imitation.
- (6) Without intentional imitation instruction would be impossible, as in reading, writing, etc.
- (7) And unintentional imitation has great influence in the growth of habit and the formation of character.

II MAN SHOULD IMITATE ONLY THE GOOD.

- 1. Because the good-doer is of God.

Principles:

- (1) He proves that he is a child of God by his likeness to his Father in character and conduct.
- (2) Notice how practical is the apostle's idea of true personal religion.
- (3) The godly man is the man who does good; his good works are the evidence of his godliness.
- (4) We should imitate the good because of their intimate and blessed relation to God.

- 2. Because the evil-doer has no true knowledge of God.

Principles:

- (1) By doing evil we must understand not an occasional and exceptional action, but the general tenor of life and conduct.

- (2) Purity of heart is essential to seeing God, and, where purity of heart is, sin cannot be the general characteristic of the conduct.
- (3) When a man has seen the Lord, he cannot live in the practice of sin.
- (4) He who has seen and appreciated the highest beauty cannot live in constant and willing fellowship with extreme deformity.
- (5) He whose soul has seen anything of the supremely Perfect and the infinitely Beautiful cannot look upon sin with approval; it must appear loathsome unto him.
- (6) This consideration tends to strengthen faith in the full and final salvation of every regenerate man.
- (7) He who has tasted the high joys of Divine vision and communion can never be content with the pleasures of sin or satisfied with the things of this world
- (8) Do not imitate the evil; for the practice of it darkens and destroys the vision of the soul; it excludes from the highest and divinest knowledge, even the knowledge which is the soul's life.

III GOOD EXAMPLES ARE GENERALLY AVAILABLE.

1. Demetrius

Principles:

- (1) Diotrephes was a beacon to be shunned; Demetrius, an example to be imitated.
- (2) Good character is not always accompanied by a good reputation, but in the case of Demetrius it was.

2. Gaius

- (3) This witness lies in the accordance of his walk with the requirement of God.

3. All who knew him.

- (4) In most places and societies there are some who are worth imitating.

4. And of the truth itself.

- (5) Let us imitate them in so far as they embody the truth.
- (6) There are seasons in our experience when good human examples are specially valuable.
- (7) Sometimes the Perfect Example seems to tower far about

our imitation, and we despair of every copying that with success. In such moods the excellent human example is peculiarly precious.

- (8) It is not so very much higher than our own level of attainment; it encourages us; and, when our despondency has passed away, we are able to aspire once more for conformity to the Supreme Example.

Valediction

vs. 13-14

Principles:

- (1) What a precious boon communication by writing is when communication by speech is unattainable!
- (2) How valuable is writing also when accuracy and permanence are desired.
- (3) Yet writing has its disadvantages as compared with speech.

I THE APOSTLE'S HOPE.

Principles:

John hoped for communication by speech, which, as compared with writing, is:

- (1) More easy and rapid.
- (2) More expressive.
- (3) More pleasurable.

II THE APOSTLE'S BENEDICTION.

- (4) Peace in our relation to God.
- (5) Peace in our relation to men.
- (6) Peace in our own being.
- (7) Perfect peace in heaven.

III THE APOSTLE'S GREETING.

The Aged Presbyter's Letter to a Private Church-member

vs. 1-14

I GAIUS

1. His well-being desired.

2. His relation to the truth rejoiced in.
 - (1) Truth appropriated.

Principles:

 - (a) We are to be careful to give the soul its proper nourishment, which is the truth: thoughts of God's love, thoughts of his ends in our life.
 - (b) If we entertain false views of God and of life, we are really taking poison into our souls.
 - (2) Truth carried out into conduct.
 - (c) It is under sunny skies that the finest colouring in nature is to be found.
 - (d) It is in good society that the finest accent is to be found.
 - (e) So it is those who move within the circle of the Divine thoughts, lie open to the Divine influences, that attain to the most attractive style of life.
3. Practice of hospitality.
 - (1) Commended.
 - (f) The truth *binds* the whole walk; it *specialy* bound Gaius in the practice of hospitality.
 - (2) Witnessed to.
 - (g) It was love that moved Gaius to serve the missionary brethren; and they were mindful of services rendered.
 - (3) Encouraged.
 - (h) He was to do this *worthily of God*, i.e., as representing to them the Divine solicitude.
 - a. They were deserving.
 - b. They were representative of the truth.
 - c. There is an obligation.

II DIOTREPES

1. His resistance of John's authority.
2. His coming defeat.

III DEMETRIUS

1. His unlikeness to Diotrepes.
2. Threefold testimony to his excellence.

CONCLUSION

1. Reason for not writing more.
2. Salutations.

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